

VISIT TO THE SENATE BY THE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE ARGENTINE REPUBLIC

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, it is a privilege for me today to call to the attention of the Senate the very good relations the United States has with the country of Argentina.

We are honored to have as our guest the Vice President of Argentina, Daniel Scioli, who, in his capacity, has the privilege of the floor because, as under the Argentine Constitution, so, too, under our Constitution, the Vice President of the country is also the President of the Argentine Senate. Since we have parliamentarians of the various parliaments of the world who have the privilege of the floor, it is my privilege to bring Daniel Scioli, a personal friend, to see the greatest deliberative body in the world, the United States Senate.

Argentina has had quite an economic revival. Under Vice President Scioli and President Kirchner, they have had an economic turnaround in the course of the last couple of years, particularly evident within the last year because we have seen a number of their economic problems start to come under control. We have seen a lessening of their inflation. We have seen them attempting to deal with their debt that is owed to international institutions as well as to other countries. As a matter of fact, there are very significant negotiations going on now with Argentine bondholders that are held around the world as to whether there will be some kind of forgiveness. Of course, you can imagine the bondholders are resisting that enormously. But we do know this: For Argentina to increase its economic capacity as the leader that Argentina is in Latin America, as it is very reflective of an elected government and elected democracy, it is clearly in the interest of the United States that Argentina does well.

We see that the Kirchner administration has benefited from the results of that economic revival, for President Kirchner and, no doubt, Vice President Scioli, in fact, are very high in popularity in the polls in Argentina.

It is interesting that another country in Latin America that has had tremendous economic problems—Peru, under President Toledo—likewise, is coming up in their economy, but President Toledo does not enjoy the high standing in the polls in his country of Peru that the Kirchner administration is enjoying in the polls in Argentina. I think, over the course of time, we will see President Toledo begin to rise in the polls, but he has had a very tough time.

The Vice President and I just had a discussion about a number of topics that are of mutual interest to our country. On his border with Brazil and with Paraguay, the Argentine-Paraguay-Brazilian border, called the triborder area, there is a city called Ciudad del Este, a place about which we are concerned because there is a lot

of money laundering, there is a lot of fundraising for Muslim charities, there are a lot of knockoff goods that are being sold, contraband being sold. So those conditions are ripe for terrorists to infiltrate, and it is our hope that these countries in the triborder region, the three major countries, will continue to cooperate with us.

I can tell you that Argentina has clearly cooperated with us. In the recent trip I took with Senator DODD and Senator CHAFFEE where we visited these areas, we were quite encouraged with the cooperation on terrorism getting a foothold in that region. We have seen terrorism move from the Middle East. We have seen it in Europe. We have seen it move into Africa. Our concern now is that terrorism is moving into Latin America.

Another topic of enormous mutual interest to our two countries is the question of the direction that Venezuela will take and the direction that President Chavez is taking it.

In a recent meeting with President Chavez with these other Senators, he was very friendly. He said that he was, in fact, clamping down on the FARC and the ELN, the guerrillas in Colombia coming across into Venezuela. He said, in fact, he had just returned nine FARC members to President Uribe of Colombia, and then, lo and behold, we find evidence to the contrary shortly thereafter.

I have spoken with Vice President Scioli, as well as President Kirchner of Argentina, to intercede to see if there is any common ground with the President of Venezuela because Venezuela and the United States have a mutual interest. They sell half of their daily production of oil to us. We import 15 percent of our daily consumption of oil from Venezuela. Who knows, it could be a leader just like the leader from Argentina who is visiting with us today who could be the intermediary to help improve the relations if President Chavez is sincere.

Mr. President, I wish to welcome our distinguished guest from Argentina, who has now become a personal friend of mine and my wife Grace, to this cradle of our democracy, this great deliberative body. Earlier today, he visited with our Vice President, Vice President CHENEY. We are now glad to have him come and see the body over which the Vice President of the United States sits as the President of the Senate.

Welcome, Mr. Vice President.

I thank the Chair for this opportunity. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

COMMENDING THE PEOPLE OF IRAQ ON DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to the consideration of S. Res. 38, which the clerk will report.

The assistant bill clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 38) commending the People of Iraq on the January 30, 2005, national elections.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The time until 5:30 will be equally divided between the leaders or their designees.

The Senator from Delaware.

Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, I will be speaking as the designee of Senator REID, the Democratic leader.

I rise to speak to the resolution congratulating the people of Iraq for their historic elections which took place on January 30.

The Iraqi elections were an important step forward and a tribute to the courage of the Iraqi people. It was actually incredible to see them go to the polls literally as they heard explosions in the streets. The images that we saw were quite moving.

The election is only the first step in a long road filled with potentially lethal potholes, and the next months are going to be very critical.

If the elections are to be a true turning point in the history of Iraq, then it is critical, and I believe the administration fully understands, that the administration act with the urgency that is needed in several key areas to sustain this very positive momentum.

In my view, the first priority is to build Iraqi capacity. The election, hopefully, strengthened the political legitimacy of the Iraqi government, but it did nothing to build its governing capacity.

The Iraqi government is no more capable today than it was the day before the elections of providing law and order, defeating the insurgents, or delivering basic services like water, gasoline, and electricity.

We have squandered 2 years developing these capabilities, and now it is time to move into high gear, especially in training Iraqi forces that are able to operate independently and effectively. Our ability to draw down responsibly in Iraq depends on that happening.

Second, we must promote political power sharing. Because many Sunni Arabs stayed home or, quite frankly, were scared away, understandably I might add, from the polls, they may feel even more alienated and continue to support the insurgency.

I am encouraged by conciliatory statements by some Sunni-affiliated organizations that suggest they are willing to work with the new government in drafting Iraq's permanent constitution. We all should remember this election was primarily about electing people who are going to be the people who write the constitution. In a sense, it is a little bit like our Constitutional Convention that took place in Philadelphia. These folks are going to write